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# **ION AGÂRBICEANU`S JOURNALISTIC ACTIVITY**

Ph.D. thesis summary

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**Keywords:** Ion Agârbiceanu, journalism, politics, religion, culture, Tribuna, Patria, Transylvania.

## **Introduction**

This paper aims to analyze the journalistic activity of the Romanian writer Ion Agârbiceanu. With a career of over six decades, he is one of the most important Transylvanian writers, considered by the literary critics a descendant of Ioan Slavici and a forerunner of Liviu Rebreanu.

His journalistic activity, not studied in depth until now, is a very rich one, both quantitatively and thematically, so the analysis and publication, and implicitly its valorization represents a need for the writer's memory and his complete knowledge.

Ion Agârbiceanu published over 2,000 articles in 66 Romanian newspapers and magazines, between 1903 and 1962. Taking into account the fact that he witnessed almost all the key moments of the twentieth century, his journalism can offer a new and complex perspective on the society of the time.

The purpose of this research was to discover the main topics in Ion Agârbiceanu's articles and their frequency. Thus, the applied content analysis revealed the main ideas expressed by the writer, his positions towards certain topics, people, and events in society, but also the changes over time.

### **1. Ion Agârbiceanu – biographical considerations**

The first chapter of the paper reviews the main events in Ion Agârbiceanu's life. In order to understand the context of certain ideas or the oscillation of the number of articles published in some periods, knowledge of all aspects of the writer's life is essential. The subchapter related to his life and professional activity presents information about his education, his preoccupations from the beginning of his career, but also about the experience of the first years of priesthood, in particularly difficult conditions, at Bucium-Șasa, and then at Orlat. The next important event is the retreat with the Romanian army, in 1916, and the traumatic experience, during the refuge at Râmnicu-Vâlcea, then at Roman, followed by the evacuation to Russia and the return to Romania. The writer then settled in Cluj, where he ran the newspapers *Patria* (1919-1927) and *Tribuna* (1938-1940), and in the Second World War, he took refuge in Sibiu, after the Vienna Dictate. After the end of the world conflagration, he returns to Cluj, where he will remain until the end of his life.

Regarding the literary work, one of its exegetes, Mircea Popa, structures Ion Agârbiceanu's work on four main pillars, which constitute the *constellation of the real*: the Social, the Eros, the Fantastic and the Nature. At the same time, he identifies five essential typologies of the characters: Homo Militans, Homo Moralis, Homo Diabolicus, Homo Meditativus, and Homo Religiosus. Eugen Lovinescu appreciates the human nature of the characters, the storytelling qualities, the lively dialogues, and the expressive language. The criticism is related to the fact that the heroes “have no soul, or if they have it, the writer could not see and evoke it”<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time, Aurel Sasu noticed that one of the common points of Agârbiceanu's works is the suffering, physical and moral, the deep pain and loneliness, “the obsession of failure, in a word, the feeling of an irremediable loss, of a sunset”.

A common point of view among literary critics is that Agârbiceanu's work always brings into question the ethical element. The literary critic George Călinescu wrote, for instance, that the moral thesis is “absorbed in deeds, objectified, and the only attitude that the author allows himself is to make the virtue sympathetic”<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, Eugen Simion considers that the text is predictable, and the moralizing tendency of the prelate is obvious, but, not infrequently, it has aesthetic coverage. At the same time, the work is substantial, and to always suspect it of moralism is an error of literary criticism<sup>3</sup>.

Last but not least, the literary works are marked by descriptions of nature and of the village environment, which the writer fully experienced during his childhood.

Another remark often encountered in literary criticism, is that Ion Agârbiceanu is a descendant of Ioan Slavici and a forerunner of Liviu Rebreanu.

## 2. Methodology and research design

This paper answered the following research questions:

- (1) What were the main topics in Ion Agârbiceanu's articles?
- (2) What was the frequency of journalistic articles during his entire career?
- (3) How did Ion Agârbiceanu relate to the socio-political events of the period 1903-1962?

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<sup>1</sup> Mircea Zăciu, *Ion Agârbiceanu*, Minerva Publishing, Bucharest, 1972, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> George Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii române. Compendiu*, Minerva Publishing, Bucharest, 1983, p. 230.

<sup>3</sup> Ion Agârbiceanu, *Opere. I. Schițe și povestiri (1902-19010)*. Edition made by Ilie Rad. Chronological table, edition note, bibliography, notes and comments, critical references by Ilie Rad. Introductory study by Eugen Simion, Romanian Academy, National Foundation for Science and Art, Bucharest, 2014, p. LXVII.

(4) To what extent has the writer expressed his political beliefs over time when reporting on events or people?

(5) To what extent has the preoccupation for ethics and morals, predominant in the literary work, manifested itself in the journalistic activity?

(6) What was the writer's position on the changes of the country's leaders (kings, governments) and forms of government (monarchy, royal dictatorship, communism)?

(7) What were Ion Agârbiceanu's main concerns in religious articles?

(8) What were Ion Agârbiceanu's main concerns in cultural articles?

The research method used in this paper is the content analysis, both qualitative and quantitative. It was applied to the three most complex categories: socio-political, religious, and cultural. Of the 1,860 articles, 1,103 were selected for analysis.

The quantitative analysis allowed the understanding, on a large scale, of the main topics in Ion Agârbiceanu's journalism, as well as the oscillations in terms of opinions and orientations. At the same time, it facilitated the analysis, from an objective perspective, especially in the case of more delicate or more insistently presented subjects, of vehement opinions or harsh criticism, which can affect the results of exclusively qualitative analysis, generating wrong impressions about the importance of certain topics.

The qualitative analysis, on the other hand, facilitated a detailed approach of the articles, direct analysis of the messages, of the latent content, and the understanding of the meanings. Based on this type of analysis, Ion Agârbiceanu's opinions on the topics addressed were presented in detail, as well as the construction of the articles, style, language, or rhetoric. Also, the content was structured thematically, in subcategories of topics, within each general category of articles.

Regarding the analysis grid for socio-political articles, it includes categories related to Ion Agârbiceanu's position towards various people or ideas, each representing a distinct item: problems and trends in society, political leaders, public institutions, the younger generation and contemporaries, international issues, but also the Church. At the same time, the frequency of some topics was followed, such as national unity, the future of the country, the need for morality in society, the call to work, the concern for ordinary people, or the issue of minorities.

In the religious articles, the positive or negative position of Ion Agârbiceanu towards the same items was followed. The political, social, and educational component of these writings, as

well as the religious entities invoked, were also taken into account. In this analysis, attention was also paid to the reflection of the activity and possible problems of the priests, along with morality, the need for faith, atheism, various theological concepts, and, last but not least, national unity and faith.

The analysis grid of cultural articles was focused on topics such as the need for mass education, the development of the society through culture, issues of artists and intellectuals, cultural institutions, or the promotion of national culture.

### **3. Socio-political articles**

The next three chapters of the paper, together with the related subchapters, present the results of the content analysis. Regarding the category of socio-political articles, 594 articles were analyzed, which present the writer's opinions, regarding the main events of the period. These were the most diverse: two world wars, changes in the form of government, changes of governments and kings, political and economic crises, nationally and internationally. Thus, the study material was a complex one, which allowed the understanding of the writer's points of view, as well as his positioning, from a political point of view.

He had, throughout the socio-political journalism, a concern for the creation and consolidation of the unitary national state, for ethics and morals in society, but also a concern for ordinary people, especially those from villages. When it comes to the needs of citizens, the spiritual ones are put above the material ones, but the author shows pragmatism and draws attention to the financial, health, and educational needs of the rural population.

The interwar period is marked by a deep disappointment with the lack of involvement of politicians and citizens in the development of society, but also with the political class, marked by competition and self-interest, to the detriment of national well-being.

### **4. Religious articles**

In the chapter dedicated to religious journalism, all 263 published articles were analyzed. The results are surprising here as well, depicting a priest particularly concerned with the proper running of society and public morals.

Here we also find numerous articles about moral values: “Did it never seem to you that you sang like a nightingale, that you froze everyone? Didn't it seem to you that you preached or



said a profane speech, to astonish the crowd? Have you ever been convinced that your certificate, your brilliant diploma, must be known to everyone? [...] Well, in all these and other countless cases, you have been a ridicule of life”<sup>4</sup>.

As in the literary work or the volume of meditations *The Light of Christianity (Fața de lumină a creștinismului)*, the writer also criticizes the priests, whom he believes should do more than hold services and preach, being obliged to get involved in society, to contribute in solving the problems of the people in their parishes.

## 5. Cultural articles

The third category selected includes cultural articles, all 246 being analyzed. These illustrate the writer's concerns for the culturalization of the masses, but also the solutions he proposes in this regard. Most of the articles encourage the idea of cultural propaganda, through which the state popularizes local creation and facilitates education. The next category is represented by the articles about *Astra*, within which Ion Agârbiceanu had an intense activity. Last but not least, he wrote about the role of the press in society or about the importance of cultural centers and libraries, especially in villages.

## 6. Ion Agârbiceanu, in the evidence of the communist Secret Services Department

The last chapter of this paper presents the file registered by the old communist Secret Services Department (*Securitate*) on Ion Agârbiceanu`s name, during 1948-1963. The document contains 25 informative notes, in most of them being reported that the subject does not want to comment on current political issues. The informant receives several orders to have more in-depth discussions with the writer, in order to find out what he thinks, but without any success. An interesting note concerns the editorial staff of *Tribuna* magazine, the main editors being described in an offensive way.

## 7. Conclusions

This paper analyzed, therefore, the three most complex categories of articles in Ion Agârbiceanu's journalism: socio-political, religious, and cultural. The first category is also the most extensive, comprising more than half of the articles. At the opposite pole are those about

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<sup>4</sup> I. Agârbiceanu, *Ridicolii vieții*, in *Unirea*, year XIX, no. 27, 10 July 1909, p. 238-239.

art, music, and theater, festivities and commemorations, folklore and ethnography, and language issues.

Most of his journalistic activity is concentrated in the newspaper *Tribuna*, which he led for two years, between 1938-1940, with a double number compared to *Patria*, whose director he was between 1919-1927.

Socio-political topics were, therefore, the most common in Ion Agârbiceanu's journalism, counting more than half of the total articles published during his lifetime. The writer was strongly anchored in the present, up to date with everything that was happening in society, with the main currents, trends, and habits. He was a fine observer of reality, which he transposed both in literary and journalistic work. Given his profession of a priest, the social side of all his writings is emphasized. It exposes people's problems and insists on finding solutions, offers advice, especially to villagers, but, at the same time, severely punishes impropriety, laziness, and lack of morality.

The achievement of the national state, by uniting the Romanians from all the provinces, which, until 1918, were under different occupations, was one of Ion Agârbiceanu's major desideratum, visible since his first articles. He campaigned for this since the early twentieth century, and even in the years of World War II.

Great respect was constantly directed to the country's leaders. The four kings of Romania, Carol I, Ferdinand I, Mihai I, and Carol II, had appreciations, were considered wise, honest, with moral values and engaged in the fight for the consolidation of the Romanian society.

At the beginning of the Second World War, Ion Agârbiceanu campaigned for neutrality. Almost every article published after September 1939 highlighted the importance of maintaining the country's borders, by not getting involved in the war. After the Vienna Dictate, the discourse changes and focuses on defense policy. The main idea, expressed repeatedly, with a noticeable pain, is that Romania has been involved, over time, in wars that it has not provoked.

Taking into account the topics approached, this paper confirms the self-characterization that Agârbiceanu made himself, within the confessions available in the Golden Sound Library: “a writer who cared about the pains and sufferings of our nation”<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Ion Agârbiceanu, about his activity in Cluj. Transcription after recordings from the Golden Sound Library (*Fonoteca de Aur*) - Radio Romania.

The articles with a religious profile are not limited to topics related to divinity or religious concepts but have an important social and even political component. The main issue is the need for faith and morals, seen as the only way to consolidate society. It is a permanent insistence, especially in ecclesiastical articles, but not only. He wrote about a behavior in accordance with moral standards every time he had the opportunity, especially in religious articles. His belief was that private life, lived properly, will generate a positive change in society as a whole.

Ion Agârbiceanu's cultural articles deal with serious and complex issues as well. The development of society through culture, but also the need to educate the masses are recurring topics, as there was a low consumption of culture on a large scale.

Being an active member of Astra, within which he also held leadership positions, Ion Agârbiceanu knew very well the state of education and culture in Romania, so he proposed measures that the state should take. Moreover, after Astra took over the application of the social service law, the contact with ordinary citizens was even more frequent, therefore his image about the need to educate the population was accurate.

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